

NORTH CAROLINA STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE
Office of Archives and History
Department of Cultural Resources

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

St. Alban's Episcopal Church

Littleton, Halifax County, HX1281, Listed 4/20/2011

Nomination by Druscilla H. York

Photographs by Druscilla H. York, January 2010



Overall view



Façade view

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

1. Name of Property

historic name St. Alban's Episcopal Church

other names/site number Chapel of the Cross

2. Location

street & number 300 Mosby Avenue not for publication

city or town Littleton vicinity

state North Carolina code NC county Halifax code 083 zip code 27850

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

 national statewide X local

Signature of certifying official/Title _____ Date _____

North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official _____ Date _____

Title _____ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government _____

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

 entered in the National Register determined eligible for the National Register

 determined not eligible for the National Register removed from the National Register

 other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper _____ Date of Action _____

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5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	private
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - Local
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - State
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - Federal

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	district
<input type="checkbox"/>	site
<input type="checkbox"/>	structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RELIGION: religious facility – church

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RELIGION: religious facility - church

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE VICTORIAN: Gothic

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: BRICK

walls: WOOD: weatherboard

roof: METAL: tin

other:

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Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

Summary Paragraph

Completed in 1891 and initially known as the Chapel of the Cross until its consecration in 1904 by Bishop Joseph Cheshire, St. Alban's Episcopal Church is a gable-front frame Gothic Revival-style mission church with entrance vestibule, square belfry, chancel extension, and sacristy wing. Features such as lancet windows, belfry, and pointed-arch entrys clearly embody the Gothic Revival style as did the original board-and-batten sheathing. Exceptional Gothic Revival-style interior details include scissor trusses, darkly-stained herringbone-patterned beaded-board ceiling, darkly-stained beaded wainscoting, white plaster walls, and pointed flat-arch chancel entrance. Today, ca. 1926 plain weatherboards sheathe the exterior, patterned tin protects each roof, and the brick pier foundation is infilled with brick. Facing Mosby Avenue to the east, the church is situated in a residential neighborhood on a large, level, rectangular lot at the southwest corner of College Street and Mosby Avenue. Lined with substantial late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century homes, Mosby Avenue is the main residential corridor into Littleton from the south, and formerly the Littleton Female College was one block west of Mosby Avenue at the terminus of College Street. Sidewalks skirt the property's street frontage, and a Stewart Iron Works hair-pin fence extends along Mosby Avenue and then frames the sanctuary along College Street. A linear brick walk extends from the Mosby Avenue sidewalk directly to a brick stoop with iron handrails at the church entrance. Following an east-west orientation, the church with vestibule and sacristy are connected at the southwest rear corner by additions built in 1952, an office hyphen and a parish hall that faces College Street on a north-south axis. Typical plantings such as boxwoods and azaleas form beds around the church. A two-story frame rectory constructed in 1898, now demolished, once occupied the open area just south of the church. Mature magnolia, pine, holly, and cedar trees interspersed with azaleas and nandina casually frame this open area, which is now being transformed into a memorial garden. A mix of Chinese holly, camellias, bay and ligustrum lines the western boundary. The lot measures approximately 143 feet by 154 feet deep with the church positioned approximately twenty feet from its northeast corner. The property is in excellent condition and maintains its overall integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

Narrative Description

Embodying the transitional growth in North Carolina of a small mission church to one more adequate for an established congregation, St. Alban's maintains the overall Gothic Revival form and character of its late nineteenth-century mission origins, usually represented by a simple frame gable-front nave with apse. This small church with weatherboard sheathing also includes an enclosed gable-front vestibule, with a Gothic-arch central entrance and double-leaf doors hung on strap hinges. The vestibule typically opens into a nave with center aisle, and an elevated chancel extends beyond the nave. In 1901 the original chancel, a simple apse, was enlarged to its present form, which includes a more expansive three-stage elevated chancel area and an enlarged sacristy. In all likelihood, the present chancel's second stage level defines the configuration of the former apse, with communion rail relocated.

The body of the church measures approximately twenty-four-and-a-half feet by fifty-eight-and-a-half feet; the vestibule approximately ten feet by eight feet. At the front gable and straddling the ridge rises a belfry featuring a weatherboard exterior with louvers and a pyramidal roof with bellcast eaves. A cross caps this roof. Patterned tin shingles protect the roof of the vestibule, church, sacristy, and belfry. All corner boards are plain with quarter-round edges, and a tall, plain baseboard with a fillet edge skirts the structure. The side elevations of

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the vestibule have one bay and those of the nave have three bays. Each bay contains a lancet window with stained glass. Vertical board shutters with strap hinges flank all windows. The original brick pier foundation is now in-filled with brick.

The chancel is flanked by a sacristy wing to the south and a narrow vesting room to the north. The height of the chancel's gable roof drops beneath that of the nave. At its rear northwest corner, an exterior Gothic-arch doorway that opens into the former vesting room is comprised of a five-panel door and an arched two-light transom. The sacristy wing has a gable-front roof with simple board cornice returns and a central entrance entered via a raised brick stoop with iron handrail. This Gothic-arch entrance has a five-panel door and a transom above with y-tracery. A single lancet window with double sash and two-over-two lights stands along its side elevation. All exterior features correspond with those of the nave and vestibule.

The interior finishes of both the vestibule and nave are similar, with plaster walls, dark stained woodwork, and a vertical beaded wainscoting that measures two-and-a-half feet tall. The ceilings of both also feature narrow beaded boards. Their use, however, in the nave creates a highly decorative herringbone pattern that alternates between the exposed rafters. Five rows of exposed purlins further divide each diagonal unit. Tied to each rafter is an impressive scissor truss. All rafters, purlins, and trusses have chamfered edges.

A Gothic-arch provides entry from the small vestibule into the nave through a double-leaf doorway. Each leaf has six raised horizontal panels, and a stained glass window signifying St. Alban is set within the arch. Eleven ranges of pine pews flank the central aisle. Each pew end features a trefoil at its back, a shield at the seat, and a cusped arch between its front and rear legs. All the nave windows contain stained glass, both scenic and symbolic, with small geometric panes. Two pairs of glass-globe lantern lights are suspended from alternating trusses.

The progression from the nave to the altar reflects the 1901 enlargement of the chancel area and transitions through four single-step levels: choir, lectern, communion rail, and altar. Two free-standing square-in-section posts support and define the original juncture of the rear wall of the nave with the apse. Here the chancel is marked by a smaller gable that mirrors the pitch of the main roof. A paneled cornice outlines and accents this transition as well as runs the length of the chancel. Each panel is accented by darker moldings. The roof of the chancel area has narrow beaded board sheathing running its length as well as a simple, tall, beaded, vertical, board wainscoting within the communion rail. The wooden communion rail with central opening features columns with four bracketed feet and spandrels with cutwork trefoils and volute edges. Centrally located behind the rail, the altar is placed on a base carved in Old English script that reads "Draw Near With Faith." Cusped blind arches highlight the face of the altar. The reredos includes a tall panel sheathed in narrow beaded board outlined with molded edges beneath a triplet window with stained glass and a slightly taller central lancet. Dark stained moldings outline the reredos, triplet window, cornice panels, and wainscoting. Today, the bottom panel of the reredos is obscured by a replacement hand carved by the Rev. Belford Northrup deFoe Wagner that was installed in 1939 as a memorial to his wife. This three-part reredos with ogee arches, central canopy, and crocket accents features carvings of a dove, sheaves of wheat, and grapevines.

The sacristy is entered via two doors, each with a Gothic arch, one via the chancel and the other the choir level. The panels of the chancel door have a heavy molded frame and repeat the herringbone pattern of the nave ceiling. The other door is more slender and has a plainer finish and surround. Here beaded boards create a linear horizontal pattern, except for the louvered metal vent. Both doors have white porcelain knobs. The interior of the sacristy has beaded-board wainscoting, built-in cupboards, a sink, and a closet. Today, access to the former vesting room is gained only from the exterior. Its interior retains its beaded wainscoting.

Following the period of significance, two modifications were made to the church: the exterior application of weatherboard about 1926 and the construction in 1952 of an attached concrete-block parish hall. In all likelihood, the church's board-and-batten exterior siding was replaced with plain weatherboard due to the deterioration of the original board-and-batten siding, but no documentary explanation has come to light. Although the use of board-and-batten siding is synonymous with Gothic Revival-style mission churches, the use

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of weatherboard is also commonly identified with this style in North Carolina's Episcopal churches as exemplified in the eastern region by its use at the following Gothic Revival-style churches: St. Clement's Church (1874) in Ringwood, Halifax County; St. Martin's Church (1880) in Hamilton, Martin County; the Church of the Saviour (1887) in Jackson, Northampton County; St. John's Episcopal Church (1893-95) in Pitt County; and Grace Church (ca. 1920) in Lawrence, Edgecombe County.

The addition of the parish house, however, represented a trend within the Episcopal Church beginning in the 1910s and 1920s to construct fellowship halls that were attached to the church. At St. Alban's, this concrete block addition was connected to the sacristy by a hyphen that is also constructed of concrete block. Protected by a shed-roof, this hyphen serves as the parish office. The gable-roof parish hall is principally a large open room that includes at its south elevation two bathrooms and a kitchen with an exterior entrance and stoop. Its floors are primarily wood. The north gable-end features an off-set street entrance with double-leaf doors and a series of three windows each with batten shutters. All parish hall windows have double-leaf metal casements. A large exterior concrete-block chimney, located midway along the west elevation, serves the parish hall. Its interior brick fireplace features a bracket supported shelf and cement hearth. Both the ca. 1926 and 1952 changes reflect building traditions that are historically compatible with the development of Episcopal churches in North Carolina, and each has a minimal impact on the overall merit of the church.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☐ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☒ A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ B removed from its original location.
- ☐ C a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ D a cemetery.
- ☐ E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ F a commemorative property.
- ☐ G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1891, 1901

Significant Dates

1891, 1901

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Mellichampe, Rev. Winborn Lawton, designer

Whitaker, Capt. J. H., builder

Picot, Tilman Vann (1855-1939), builder

Period of Significance (justification)

For St. Alban's Episcopal Church, two dates, the 1891 date of construction and the 1901 date for the enlargement of the chancel and sacristy, represent the period of significance for the church since each is a important point in its architectural history. Also, each marks a significant turning point in the church's development and contribution as an important example of the Gothic Revival style in Halifax County.

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Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)

St. Alban's Episcopal Church meets Criteria Consideration A as it is significant for its architectural merit as an important local example of the Gothic Revival style in Littleton and Halifax County that maintains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria.)

In Littleton, St. Alban's Episcopal Church, completed in 1891, is a simple moderately-pitched gable-front frame chapel typical of the Gothic Revival style that the Episcopal Church in the United States had openly prescribed since the mid-nineteenth century for small mission churches. Following a design produced by the church's rector, the Rev. W. Lawton Mellichampe, Captain J. H. Whitaker, a house carpenter, and Tilman V. Picot, a carpenter, constructed the church, first known as the Chapel of the Cross. This church embodies the stylistic and artistic values of the Gothic Revival style that were particularly attractive and economical for newly formed Episcopal congregations as small mission churches were built in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in North Carolina. These features include: on the exterior, a vestibule, belfry, lancet windows, and Gothic-arch entries; and on the interior, trusses, darkly-stained woodwork, center aisle, and elevated chancel. In 1901 the arrival of the Rev. Francis Joyner as rector, the subsequent enlargement of the church chancel, and the adoption of a new name, St. Alban's, promoted the 1904 formal consecration of the church as a parish on December 1 by the Rt. Rev. Joseph Blount Cheshire, the Bishop of the Diocese of North Carolina. In 1923 the Rev. Belford Northrop Defoe Wagner, the new rector of Emmanuel Church in Warrenton, began his eighteen-year oversight of St. Alban's, which included the removal ca. 1926 of the original board-and-batten sheathing and its replacement with plain weatherboard. Rev. Wagoner also installed in 1939 above the altar a hand-carved Gothic Revival-style reredos.

This well-preserved church is a rare example of the Gothic Revival style in the town and stands along with St. Anna's Church as the best example in Halifax County of the cooperative but separate development of white and black Episcopal mission churches during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in North Carolina. St. Alban's meets Criterion C for listing in the National Register because of its local architectural significance. It also meets Criteria Consideration A because it is a property owned by a religious institution that derives its primary significance from its architectural distinction. The church has two significant dates: 1891, when construction of the church was completed, and 1901, when the chancel was enlarged to its present form.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Through the efforts of Ellen Moore Leach and Mary S. Moore with the ministerial support of the Rev. Dr. Aristides S. Smith, the first Episcopal regular monthly services began in Littleton in 1886.¹ In addition to his duties as the rector at the Church of the Advent in Enfield and St. Clement's Church in Ringwood, Dr. Smith two years later was holding these monthly services on Sunday for Littleton's newly organized Episcopal mission. His diocesan report that year notes: "Our congregations here are very encouraging though our services are held in an upper room. They would, doubtless, be much larger if we had a comfortable Church Building to worship in."² This effort was initiated by the generous gift on April 26, 1887, by Captain John P. and Ellen D.

¹ *Journal of the Seventieth Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of North Carolina*, 1886, 26-27, hereinafter cited as *JPECNC*, date, page.

² *JPECNC*, 1888, 116-117.

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Leach of a half acre of land on Mosby Avenue at its southwest corner with College Street as a building site for this Episcopal mission church.³

Work on building the church, however, began three years later following the appointment of the Rev. Winborn Lawton Mellichampe (d. 1920) as the minister-in-charge of Littleton's fledging mission. Rev. Mellichampe was also made the new rector for two neighboring parishes, St. Mark's (1855) in Halifax, and Grace (1872) in Weldon, succeeding respectively the Rev. Herbert W. Robinson and the Rev. Gilbert Higgs. The new rectory at Grace Church became his home.⁴ Using plans drawn by Rev. Mellichampe, Captain J. H. Whitaker, a house carpenter, and Tilman V. Picot, a carpenter, began construction in 1890 of the mission church in Littleton.⁵ Little is known about the building backgrounds of Rev. W. Lawton Mellichampe, Capt. J. H. Whitaker, and Tilman Vann Picot (1855-1939). Picot, however, was a member of the Littleton congregation. A native of Charleston County, South Carolina, Rev. Mellichampe was ordained to the diaconate within the Diocese of East Carolina on July 15, 1888 at St. Paul's Church in Edenton by the Rt. Rev. W. B. W. Howe, the Bishop of the Diocese of South Carolina. For nearly a year he served two mission congregations, St. John's in South Mills and Camden Courthouse. The following year at Grace Church Weldon on December 15, 1889, Rev. Mellichampe was ordained as a minister by the Rt. Rev. Theodore B. Lyman, the Bishop of North Carolina. Earlier in July, Rev. Mellichampe had assisted Bishop Lyman and the Rev. Higgs at the consecration of Grace Church in Weldon.⁶ In 1890, he was also conducting monthly services at Garysburg, Pleasant Hill, Tillery, Convict Farms in Northampton and Halifax Counties, and occasionally at the Poor-house.⁷

In May 1890, Chapel of the Cross had become the name formally adopted by the Episcopal mission at Littleton. At this time, the predominately white congregation comprised of some forty-five persons in six families included one black member, Virgil N. Bond, a graduate of St. Augustine's College in Raleigh, North Carolina, who had moved to Littleton in 1889. Parish expenses for the church building were initially \$250.⁸ Bishop Lyman reported that on March 9, 1891, at his annual visitation to Littleton, the "new and comfortable Chapel of the Cross" was not yet completed, but said that it was a "great pleasure ...to find so neat and well arranged a place of worship, which had been wholly erected since my last visit." He expressed hope that the church "will very soon be entirely completed and ready for Consecration."⁹ Estimated to hold a congregation of 200, this board-and-batten chapel was appraised for \$800 and the property \$200. It was completed in 1891.¹⁰

Shortly thereafter, at the urging of Rev. Mellichampe, the construction of a school was undertaken rather than a rectory as the congregation had proposed. This school building, called St. Hilda's, was completed in 1893, and Lucy Capehart was its teacher.¹¹ An outgrowth of the Chapel of the Cross and St. Hilda's School was the initial development in 1893 by Virgil Bond of an African-American mission church and school that several years later would be named St. Anna's. Congressman Henry Plummer Cheatham, G. Ellis Harris, and Rev. William Walker, the Archdeacon for Colored Work in the Diocese of North Carolina, all were instrumental in developing this new mission. By 1896, the Rev. William Walker was the minister in charge at Littleton's new Episcopal Mission Chapel for its colored congregation and Bond was the schoolmaster. Although Littleton's

³ St. Alban's, Littleton, N.C., Real Estate Records, Diocese of North Carolina, Raleigh, N.C.

⁴ York, "St. Mark's Episcopal Church National Register Nomination," 8-18.

⁵ Dozier, *Looking Back on Littleton, North Carolina*, 19; U. S. Census 1880 and 1900.

⁶ *Journal of the Fifth Annual Council of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of East Carolina*, 1888, 70; 1889, 11, 5; 1890, 9, hereinafter cited as *JPECEC*, date, page; *JPECNC*, 1890, 6, 19, 30.

⁷ *JPECNC*, 1890, 101-102.

⁸ Dozier, *Town Leaders, Littleton*, 48-49; *JPECNC*, 1890, 102. Note: This was the first year that the Chapel of the Cross was listed separately as a congregation and by name. Also, the notation of "mission" was not used.

⁹ *JPECNC*, 1891, 73.

¹⁰ *JPECNC*, 1891, 111.

¹¹ Dozier, *Looking Back on Littleton*, 19.

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white congregation increased gradually each year and its Sunday school and parish school figures reflected significant growth, the colored community grew faster.¹²

Having spearheaded the construction of the church and school, the Rev. W. Lawton Mellichampe was called in 1893 to service in Alabama, and the church was without a minister for several years.¹³ During the interim the archdeacon Rev. William Walker and the Rev. John H. Milbank supplied the church until the arrival of the Rev. Girard W. Phelps in 1895. Soon a rectory valued at \$700 was constructed, with the church incurring an indebtedness of \$400.¹⁴ Although his work focused on Littleton, Rev. Phelps also provided services at other churches in Halifax and Edgecombe counties. By 1899, the Rev. B. S. Bronson became the minister in charge at the Chapel of the Cross for a short period of time.¹⁵

With the beginning of the twentieth century, three significant transitions occurred that transformed the Chapel of the Cross, providing it with a new identity, a period of stability, and an improved worship space. On November 1, 1900, a majority of members signed and sent to the Rt. Rev. Joseph Blount Cheshire, the Bishop of North Carolina, a petition to officially organize the Littleton church "into a congregation and Church of the said Diocese under the Constitution and Canons there of by the name and title of Saint Alban's Church." The church warden, W. L. Powell, sent the petition to Bishop Cheshire with a cover letter stating that "the required amount of \$200 necessary to secure a local minister" had been secured. On November 9, 1900, Bishop Cheshire agreed to the request by signing it and clearly wrote "St. Alban's Mission" in his statement of approval. He then appointed officers for the upcoming year, with W. L. Powell continuing to serve as the church warden.¹⁶

Shortly thereafter, the Rev. Francis Joyner (1853-1942) relocated to Littleton, becoming the rector for the newly named St. Alban's Mission. Ordained on June 21, 1899 at Bath, Rev. Joyner settled there with his family and served St. Alban's for nineteen years before retiring. He also ministered to the Church of the Saviour in Jackson from 1905 to 1916. Soon after Rev. Joyner's arrival at St. Alban's, he spearheaded a remodeling project to enlarge the chancel to its present form. In all probability, the original chancel and small vestry were lengthened and the sacristy enlarged as a gable-roof addition to south elevation. This work was undertaken by the church's original carpenter, Tilman V. Picot.¹⁷ Unfortunately, this ongoing work prevented use of the church for the funeral of its warden, W. L. Powell, following his death on July 30, 1901.¹⁸

Officially, the shift in status from a mission to a church occurred on December 1, 1904, when Bishop Cheshire consecrated St. Alban's Church. A petition for consecration was signed by local church officials, Francis Joyner (priest), Harry Cawthorne, Littleberry Vinson, and Tilman Picot, who declared that "...there is no lien, claim debt, demand or charge of any kind, unpaid and subsisting for which said building or premises can be made liable either in law or in good conscience."¹⁹ St. Alban's had grown into a congregation supporting fourteen families, seventy-two baptized people, and thirty-five communicants as well as the Woman's Auxiliary and Parish Guild. It was also ably contributing to various Diocesan and General Funds. The valuation for the church was \$1,000 and its rectory \$800.

Stability characterized the first half of the twentieth century for St. Alban's. Through Rev. Joyner's ministrations, the church remained constant and strong. Improvements were undertaken periodically. For two years in a row, fairly large investments were made: \$320.99 in 1907 and \$452.96 in 1908. Another less costly

¹² *JPECNC*, 1894, 119-120; 1895, 97; 1896, 86-87.

¹³ *JPECNC*, 1893, 90.

¹⁴ *JPECNC*, 1896, 96; 1897, 84.

¹⁵ *JPECNC*, 1899, 89-90; 1900, 93-94.

¹⁶ St. Alban's, Littleton, 1900, Petitions for Organization and Consecration, Joseph B. Cheshire Papers, Diocese of North Carolina, Raleigh, N. C.

¹⁷ "1890-1994: 104th Anniversary St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Littleton, North Carolina," [5].

¹⁸ St. Alban's Parish Register, I, 166.

¹⁹ Real Estate Records: St. Alban's, Littleton, Halifax County, Diocese of North Carolina, Raleigh, N.C.

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set of unidentified improvements occurred between 1914 and 1916.²⁰ More than likely, this last set may have related to the purchase and installation of the Stewart Iron Works fence. A documentary photograph clearly records the ca. 1916 appearance of St. Alban's and its rectory. It stands without a fence and retains its original board and batten sheathing. Following Rev. Joyner's retirement in 1919, the Rev. Edward W. Baxter and later the Rev. John H. Crosby each served as the rector for two years at Emmanuel Church in Warrenton, but also had charge over the Church of the Good Shepherd at Ridgeway and St. Alban's in Littleton. Warrenton served as their home base.²¹

The arrival in late 1923 of the Rev. Belford Northrup deFoe Wagner as the new rector of Emmanuel Church in Warrenton marked a period of change for all three of his charges, especially Warrenton and Littleton.²² In Warrenton, discussions were simmering about remodeling Emmanuel Church, built in 1822 by Thomas Bragg. As these discussions continued, St. Alban's apparently paid significant amounts for improvements, \$1,386 in 1926 and \$231.50 in 1927, as noted by Charles E. Foster, the church treasurer. In all probability, these were for the installation of weatherboard to replace the church's original board-and-batten sheathing. The church's financial records at no other time document such large expenditures.²³ About the same time, in April 1927, Emmanuel Church let its contract to L. Weiden Company in Roanoke Rapids for applying a brick veneer to Emmanuel Church at a cost of \$17,300. William Lawrence Bottoms of New York was the architect.²⁴ At St. Alban's more than ten years later, the Rev. Wagner introduced in 1939 another change when he presented for the church a carved reredos that he made in memory of his wife, Mary Lillian Ham Wagner. His sudden death at Grace Church in Weldon on November 13, 1941, left a huge vacancy in each parish.

Like other small parishes in the diocese during the mid-twentieth century, St. Alban's made plans for and built a parish house in 1952. Featuring a large fireplace in a great room, this structure became a community gathering place. Ever since then, all care for the church has been undertaken with an eye toward maintenance and a respect for its history and liturgy. The parish house, however, does not fall within the period of significance of this nomination.

Developmental history/additional historic context information (if appropriate)

Religious and Architectural Context

As new Protestant Episcopal churches were built in North Carolina during the second half of the nineteenth century, church architectural preferences within the Episcopal denomination were increasingly rooted in the Gothic Revival style and reflected a progression in design and theological ideals. Congregations within towns and villages tended to embrace this ideal in new church construction as local economics allowed. Some small rural congregations, however, continued to construct simple churches reflecting regional building traditions.

²⁰ *JPECNC*, 1907, 96; 1908, 89; 1914, 101; 1915, 95; 1916, 102.

²¹ "Lovely Saint Alban's Church In Littleton Has Hint of England," *Warren Record*, September 20, 1989; *JPECNC*, 1920, 16-17; 1921, 98; 1923, 128; 1924, 75.

²² *JPECNC*, 1924, 74-75.

²³ St. Alban's Day Book, 498.

²⁴ "To Remodel Immanuel [*sic*] Church, Warrenton," *Carolina Churchman*, May 1927, 8.

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For Episcopalians, the former evangelical emphasis on worship had given way to the Ecclesiological movement and its study of liturgical and symbolic functions within the worship service of the medieval Gothic church. Appointments, vestments, and ceremonies were becoming common practice.²⁵ The strong influence of the Cambridge Camden Society in England, which published in 1841 *The Ecclesiologist*, “a periodical devoted to church building, restorations, ritual, and symbolism,” had given rise to the development of an English Gothic Revival standard.²⁶ Both Richard Upjohn and The New York Ecclesiological Society were its proponents and had established nationally important architectural standards.

The New York Ecclesiological Society, founded in 1847, had held its first meeting on April 2, 1848. Its founders included clergymen, architects, and laymen, many of whom were associated with the General Theological Seminary and the ministers of the large New York congregations. An English architect, Frank Wills, immediately became the society's official architect. Beginning in October 1848, the society published over the next five years the *New York Ecclesiologist*, “a journal intended to disseminate Ecclesiological precepts and educate the Episcopal clergy in church architecture, history, and liturgical tradition.”²⁷ In 1852, the society named Frank Wills, Wills's partner Henry Dudley, John W. Priest, and Richard Upjohn and Company to its first list of approved architects. In 1852, Upjohn published *Upjohn's Rural Architecture*, a pattern book that included good designs for simple churches.²⁸ Episcopal congregations in several North Carolina cities and towns, namely Asheville, Edenton, Goldsboro, Halifax, Lexington, Plymouth, Raleigh, and Scotland Neck, received church designs by either Priest, Upjohn or Wills.²⁹

In an effort to control the quality of Gothic Revival architectural design, the New York Ecclesiological Society recommended “the Early English parish church as the most suitable model for religious edifices.”³⁰ The society also promoted the restoration of the chancel, use of asymmetry in placement of a tower and/or entrance, and separation of chancel and nave by a rood screen or altar rail as well as a heavily defined arched opening. The steep pitch of the roof, the tall spire of the bell tower, the elevation of the chancel, and the use of stained glass, were all symbolic Gothic Revival stylistic elements. If walls could not be decoratively painted, then all woodwork was to be darkly stained.³¹ The altar became the chancel's focal point, with the pulpit and lectern placed to each side. Crosses were also placed on altars and steeples or roofs.³² Both Priest and Wills believed that as the society evaluated the English ideals expressed in *The Ecclesiologist*, a uniquely American architectural interpretation of a Gothic Revival style would develop.³³

Missionary initiatives and clergy interest provided the guiding force in the architectural development of the Protestant Episcopal Church in North Carolina. Between 1831 and 1883, three successive bishops of North Carolina, Levi Silliman Ives, Thomas Atkinson [1807-1881], and Theodore Benedict Lyman [1815-1893], provided leadership within the statewide diocese. As each traveled throughout the Diocese of North Carolina making visitations, its challenges, needs, and opportunities became apparent. In about 1830, the diocese

²⁵ Albright, *History of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, 292.

²⁶ Loth and Sadler, *Only Proper Style*, 61.

²⁷ Loth and Sadler, *Only Proper Style*, 62.

²⁸ Loth and Sadler, *Only Proper Style*, 61.

²⁹ *JPECNC*, 1848, 22; Butchko, *Edenton: An Architectural Portrait*, 137-138; *JPECNC*, 1849, 19; Smith, *History of Trinity Parish*, 39-40; *JPECNC*, 1856, 14, 46-47; Stanton, *Gothic Revival*, 180, 187; St. Mark's Episcopal Church Parish Register, Halifax, NC in possession of Ruth Proctor in Halifax, NC; Bishir and Southern, *Guide Historic Architecture of Eastern North Carolina*, 379; *JPECNC*, 1854, 42.

³⁰ Loth and Sadler, *Only Proper Style*, 62.

³¹ Pierson, *American Buildings and Their Architects*, 154-158.

³² Albright, *Protestant Episcopal Church*, 187.

³³ Pierson, *American Buildings and Their Architects*, 201-205; Stanton, *Gothic Revival*, 180-181, 187, 211. In North Carolina, the earliest known work of Henry Dudley is in 1871 at St. James Church, Wilmington.

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included approximately 900 communicants in sixteen parishes, only four of which were west of Raleigh. By 1883 these numbers, however, had multiplied significantly to 5,889 communicants in 117 parishes and mission stations.³⁴ This growth within the church was achieved primarily through outreach by a dedicated clergy, both priests and deacons, many of whom were missionaries from northern states. Before his departure in 1852, Bishop Ives viewed Gothic churches as being “the most stable and enduring, and trust-worthy monuments of truth.”³⁵ Elected as Ives’s successor in 1853, Thomas Atkinson was called to North Carolina from Baltimore, Maryland, where he had organized Grace Church in 1850 and had overseen the construction and completion, in 1852, of this Gothic Revival-style gem designed by the Baltimore architectural firm of Niernsee and Nielson.³⁶

In North Carolina, Atkinson quickly identified several needs that, when addressed, would aid the denomination’s growth and actively expand its calling to the poor and less educated within the state. In 1855, his primary charge to the clergy noted four actions that would promote church growth: to consider carefully “some relaxation of the Ruberics [*sic*] for the conduct of public worship;” to foster within the working class a calling to the ministry; to slowly eliminate the practice of pew rental; and to develop endowments supporting Episcopal churches and schools. To underpin this growth, Atkinson believed that “schools, colleges, seminaries, parsonages, asylums, and in various other forms, endowments” would be required.³⁷ In 1856, Bishop Atkinson eloquently stated the need for new ministers, churches, and parsonages to serve the needs of the diocese. He thought the needs should be met by the people of the diocese itself through the development of parochial and diocesan schools.³⁸

Bishop Atkinson’s pleas stimulated action. More churches became involved in construction projects, which included schools, churches, and parsonages. Parochial schools were built in Asheville, Beaufort, Elizabeth City, Lincolnton, and New Bern.³⁹ In 1853, the number of parsonages in the diocese totaled five; by 1858, however, twelve more had been built or purchased.⁴⁰

The Ecclesiological movement during the 1850s influenced in North Carolina the designs of Gothic Revival-style churches, with its ubiquitous use of the pointed arch, in such cities and towns as Beaufort, Elizabeth City, Hertford, Jackson, Murfreesboro, Tarboro, and Wilmington, but Episcopal church construction in rural areas continued to reflect traditional building patterns within a region. The more sophisticated town churches were of masonry construction and followed the Gothic precepts of the early English parish church. These included Christ Church [NRHD, 1977] in Elizabeth City, by John Crawford Neilson of Baltimore, 1856-1857; and Calvary Church [NR, 1971] in Tarboro, by William Percival, 1859-1867. Contemporary with these structures were the more modest board-and-batten churches with their steeply pitched gable-front roofs, such as St. Mark’s Church [NR, 1998], 1854-1855, in Halifax; the former St. Barnabas’s Church, 1856-1859, in Murfreesboro; and St. Paul’s Church [NRHD, 1974], 1856-1860, in Beaufort.⁴¹ Other churches followed a similar form but were sheathed instead with weatherboard. These include Church of the Holy Trinity [NR, 1998], 1849-1851, in Hertford; the former Church of the Saviour, 1850-1851, in Jackson; and Grace Church [NRHD, 1998], 1854-1855, in Woodville. Consecrated on November 14, 1856, Zion Church [NR, 2000] in rural Beaufort County, however, illustrates a continued adherence to a more traditional classical form.

³⁴ London and Lemmon, *Episcopal Church in North Carolina*, 172,176, 273; *JPECNC*, 1883, 178-188.

³⁵ Ives, *Address at the Laying of the Corner Stone of St. Mary’s Church, Burlington, New Jersey*, 8-9.

³⁶ Stanton, *Gothic Revival*, 284. According to Stanton, this plan appears to copy St. Mark’s, in Philadelphia, designed by John Notman. Niernsee’s partner, John Crawford Nielson, later provided the plans for Christ Church in Elizabeth City, NC, which was constructed in 1856-1857.

³⁷ Atkinson, *Primary Charge Rt. Rev. Thomas Atkinson, Bishop of North Carolina, to the Clergy*, 6-7, 11,14-16.

³⁸ *JPECNC*, 1856, 30.

³⁹ London and Lemmon, *Episcopal Church in North Carolina*, 229-231.

⁴⁰ *JPECNC*, 1858, 27.

⁴¹ *JPECNC*, 1857, 55; 1858, 54-55; 1859, 47; 1860, 52.

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Following the Civil War, members of the clergy continued to be actively involved in the provision of overall designs and/or specifications for renovations, including chancels, bell towers, porches, and transepts. In 1874, Assistant Bishop Theodore B. Lyman urged the following:

...where new churches are in contemplation, greater care should be taken to have them built in a more churchly form. It costs scarce anything more to have a building in just proportions, and in comely style, than to construct the unsightly barns which are all too often erected. A little judicious attention on the part of the Clergy, would always avail to secure buildings in perfectly good taste, while such buildings always exert a refining and elevating influence.⁴²

He also called attention to the importance of a broad central aisle and stated that placing pews in front of the chancel was "to violate every principle of good taste...."⁴³

During the three decades following the war, the Gothic Revival remained the style of preference within the Episcopal Church. In small towns and rural areas construction was predominately frame, with few masonry exceptions. Two early brick examples are St. Peter's Church [NRHD, 1979], 1869-1873, in Washington, and Grace Church [NR, 1991], 1874-1888, in Weldon. Little is known about the origin of specific designs; however, the continuing influence of Upjohn's *Rural Architecture* is apparent in many of the frame churches.⁴⁴ These churches follow basically two forms: the simple gable front, exemplified by Holy Innocents, 1879-1880, at Avoca, and St. Barnabus Church, 1887, in Snow Hill; and the gable front with central or off-set tower, exemplified by St. Martin's Church [NRHD, 1980], 1883, in Hamilton, and Grace Church [NRHD, 1974], 1885, in Trenton. The steep pitch of the gable-front roof promoted by the mid-nineteenth-century Ecclesiological movement had diminished, as illustrated by two similar Episcopal churches in Halifax County, St. Mark's (1855) in Halifax and St. Alban's (1891) [Exhibit 1] in Littleton. Many Gothic Revival-style elements were incorporated such as darkly-stained woodwork with contrasting white plaster walls, interior structural supports including brackets and trusses, and lancet windows with stained-glass. Crosses were commonly used on the interior and exterior, especially a standing cross to cap a belfry, tower, or vestibule. An arched opening that separated the nave and chancel usually defined the central importance of the chancel and altar with lectern and pulpit separated, one to each side.

The Episcopal denomination in the immediate area of Halifax County continued to grow during the last quarter of the nineteenth century as reflected by the building of missions and remodeling projects at established churches. Trinity Church in Scotland Neck and St. Mark's Church in Halifax were established congregations. Grace Church (completed 1877, consecrated 1889) in Weldon, St. Clement's Church (1873, 1874) in Ringwood, Church of the Advent (1880, 1880) in Enfield, St. Luke's (1887, 1889) in Gaston, and Chapel of the Cross (St. Alban's, 1891, 1904) in Littleton were during this time transforming from missions into consecrated parish churches with no construction or mortgage debt. All were simple gable-front frame structures with symmetrical patterning except for Grace Church, a brick gable-front edifice with an asymmetrically-placed tower and entry. The development of each was influenced by the ministrations of rectors, Rev. Aristides S. Smith and/or Rev. Gilbert Higgs. Following in their footsteps, the Rev. Winborn Lawton Mellichampe was ordained on December 15, 1889 by Bishop Lyman and soon thereafter became the rector for Grace Church and St. Mark's in Halifax as well as the minister in charge at the Littleton mission. Today of these late nineteenth-century examples, only Grace and St. Alban's survive. St. Alban's embodies the Gothic Revival style's more

⁴² *JPECNC*, 1874, 48-49.

⁴³ *JPECNC*, 1874, 49.

⁴⁴ Bishir, *North Carolina Architecture*, 314.

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typical gable-front frame mission. On the exterior, its symmetrical fenestration and lower-pitched roof are complimented on the interior, by a darkly-stained interior woodwork and a gable-roof with a scissor truss system and a herringbone-patterned narrow-beaded board ceiling.

Assistant Bishop Lyman continued to encourage congregations not only to be thoughtful about church design, but also to maintain and improve existing structures. His encouragement served as a catalyst for congregations and ministers.⁴⁵ In 1883, the newly formed Diocese of East Carolina separated from the Diocese of North Carolina. Several eastern counties, however, remained in the older diocese, including Edgecombe, Halifax, Johnston, Northampton, and Wilson. During the 1880s and 1890s, small mission churches for white and colored congregations were built to support fledging congregations, and oftentimes schools were an integral part of the process. The mission congregations at St. Luke's Mission in Gaston, Good Shepherd in Ridgeway, and Chapel of the Cross (i.e. St. Alban's) in Littleton, were by majority white. In 1891, when William Walker was appointed archdeacon in charge of colored work in the diocese, a more organized effort assisted in the development of colored missions, such as St. Luke's in Warren County, St. Matthias's in Louisburg, and St. Anna's in Littleton.

Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, accounts of renovations are recorded for churches in eastern North Carolina. Chancels, vestibules, and bell towers were the most common additions. St. James's Church, Kittrell, was reported in 1879 as having received a new chancel, front porch and bell tower;⁴⁶ St. Mark's Memorial Church, Roxobel, was also enlarged by the addition of a chancel by 1883;⁴⁷ and Church of Our Savior, Jackson, had completed by April, 1886, extensive renovations, including a corner bell tower, transept, and double lancet windows, which replaced "the old square ones."⁴⁸ By 1887, even St. Luke's in rural Washington County, was improved by the addition of a vestibule and belfry.⁴⁹ At Hertford in 1894, T. W. Watson, a local African American contractor, expanded the Church of the Holy Trinity with the addition of a narthex and bell tower.⁵⁰ In Halifax County at Grace Church, a recessed chancel replaced in 1881 the vestry room and the roof was ceiled and brackets added. The 1886 discovery of inferior exterior bricks at Grace also initiated the exterior application of stucco. At St. Mark's, a vestibule was added in 1882. St. Alban's chancel was enlarged in 1901 and the ca. 1926 its board-and-batten sheathing was replaced with plain weatherboard.⁵¹

The twentieth century heralded another building trend within the Protestant Episcopal Church, the building of parish house annexes. Initially, a project associated with larger parishes, this community-building trend became more commonplace with smaller churches in the mid-twentieth century. One of the earlier parish houses, now destroyed, was constructed in 1892 at St. James Church in Wilmington. During the 1920s, Hobart B. Upjohn, a New York architect and grandson of Richard Upjohn, designed three parish houses in eastern North Carolina: the Parish House and Chapel [1921] at Christ Church in Raleigh, the Parish House and Cloister [1922-23, 1926] at Calvary Church in Tarboro, and the new parish house called the Great Hall [1922-24] at St. James Church in Wilmington. Following another disastrous fire in 1924, Trinity Church in Scotland Neck was quickly rebuilt following the plans and specifications provided by the architectural firm of Benton and Benton in Wilson. The entire cost of this project, including the church, parish house, organ, and furnishings, was \$55,000.⁵² Benton and Benton also designed the Parish Hall [1925-26] at Christ Church in Elizabeth City.⁵³

⁴⁵ *JPECNC*, 1879, 77.

⁴⁶ *JPECNC*, 1879, 81.

⁴⁷ *JPECNC*, 1883, 68.

⁴⁸ *JPECNC*, 1886, 26.

⁴⁹ *JPECNC*, 1887, 75.

⁵⁰ Haley and Winslow, *Historic Architecture of Perquimans County*, 150.

⁵¹ York, "Grace Church," 8:8-9; York, "St. Mark's," 8:18.

⁵² Smith, *History Trinity Parish*, 47,49.

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Smaller churches, on the other hand, usually hired local contractors to construct more modest parish houses, most of which were built during the mid-twentieth century. In a few early cases, neighboring houses were purchased and used as parish houses until one could be constructed. In 1920, Church of the Holy Trinity in Hertford purchased a neighboring residence and converted it into a parish house. More than forty years later, in 1962, the construction of a new parish hall designed by John J. Rowland was undertaken.⁵⁴ Typically, this frame structure was linked to the old church by an arcade. In the 1950s, both Grace Church in Weldon and St. Mark's in Halifax constructed a masonry parish hall behind each church. At St. Mark's, an arcade connected the church with its cinder block parish hall.⁵⁵ As recently as 1990, the Church of Our Saviour in Jackson had a separate parish house designed by architect Shirley Vann and built by contractor Donald Austin across the street on a separate lot.⁵⁶

Today within the context of Littleton, St. Alban's stands as the most intact Gothic Revival-style frame building in town. All three additional Gothic Revival-style examples are churches: Littleton Presbyterian Church built ca. 1875; Littleton Methodist Church, 1902-1907; and South Street Baptist Church, ca. 1920. The Presbyterian and Baptist churches were originally gable-front frame buildings, but during the early twentieth century, each was brick veneered and received the addition of a bell tower. The Littleton Methodist Church, built by W. J. Stephenson, was completed in 1907 and stands as an intact brick Gothic Revival-style church typically featuring a T-plan, parapet gables, lancet windows, brick buttresses, and flanking entrance towers. Both towers have a brick lower stage; however, the east one includes a frame belfry with pyramidal roof and the west a heavily, crenelated single stage. Amid these local examples, St. Alban's stands as an outstanding and rare late-nineteenth century, Gothic Revival-style, frame mission church that retains its original form, most interior details, and later early twentieth-century changes that conform with those typically made by Episcopal missions as each evolved into a parish church.

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⁵³ Harris and Lee, *Raleigh Architectural Inventory*, 42; Bishir and Southern, *Guide Historic Architecture of Eastern North Carolina*, 313-314; Wrenn, *Wilmington North Carolina*, 82; Butchko, *On Shores of Pasquotank*, 274-275.

⁵⁴ York, "Church of the Holy Trinity National Register Nomination," 8-24.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)
☐ previously listed in the National Register
☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

☒ State Historic Preservation Office
☐ Other State agency
☐ Federal agency
☐ Local government
☐ University
☐ Other

Name of repository: _____

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Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 0.4959 acre
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 18 238825 4035380
Zone Easting Northing

3 _____
Zone Easting Northing

2 _____
Zone Easting Northing

4 _____
Zone Easting Northing

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The St. Alban's Episcopal Church property is identified as Halifax County tax parcel # 0703500 which identifies its boundary measurements as 144.3 feet (Mosby Avenue) by 154.05 feet (College Street) by 142.71 feet (west) by 153.60 feet (south). The property's GIS pin is 3917-12-97-7241.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary described above encompasses the land historically associated with St. Alban's Episcopal Church and provides an appropriate setting.

11. Form Prepared By

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organization Local History Associates

date November 22, 2010

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Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.

- **Continuation Sheets**

- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

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Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

Name of Property: St. Alban's Episcopal Church

City or Vicinity: Littleton

County: Halifax County

State: North Carolina

Photographer: Drucilla H. York

Date Photographed: January 19, 2010; October 29, 2010

Description of Photograph(s) and number:

St. Alban's Episcopal Church

1. Church with parish hall: oblique northwest view (January 19, 2010).
2. Front façade with fence: west view (January 19, 2010).
3. Detail of south elevation with nave window, vestibule window, and belfry (January 19, 2010).
4. Church with parish hall: oblique southeast view along College Street (January 19, 2010).
5. Nave interior: view toward entrance from vestibule (January 19, 2010).
6. Nave interior: view toward chancel with Wagner reredos (October 29, 2010).
7. Reredos carved by Rev. Wagner in 1939 (October 29, 2010).
8. Parish hall interior (October 29, 2010).

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St. Alban's Episcopal Church
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Rectory and Church, ca. 1916

Detail of framed documentary photograph at St. Alban's Church, Littleton, NC



Church, June 1938

Real Estate Records, Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina, Raleigh, NC